

## HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DECISION MAKING

### What is holistic approach to decision making?

**Holistic approach to decision making refers to the consistent demonstration of the ability to bring together a diverse range of factors when making decisions and so ensuring that your actions have a positive impact on a personal, social and global level.**

### Why is it important to have a holistic approach to decision making?

Having a holistic approach in your decision making process enables you to make well informed and well thought out decisions, rather than impulsive or reactive decisions made without the required level of information and involving assumptions.

The importance of this is that holistic, well considered decisions have a sustainability and reliability that rash, hurried decisions not only do not have, but which also have a tendency to cause more problems than they solve. This in itself is reason enough for being sure to make holistic, well informed decisions!

When we are making a decision on something, there are lots of factors to take into consideration. Every choice we make has a follow on effect in some way or another. This is another reason why it is important to be quite holistic before making decisions – especially key decisions. We need to look beyond the obvious affects for our self and / or our business, and take into consideration how it may affect others, the community and the environment. If we take notice of the effect of our decision or choice, will it have a negative or positive effect and or impact around us? If there are going to be negative consequences for our suppliers, our clients, our local community or the environment, is any short-term gain really worth it? It may well be that any short-term gain will be wiped out by longer term effects as they may be negative for our reputation, or the reliability and loyalty of our suppliers and or customers.

By taking full responsibility for our actions and the ripple effects out to the wider environment in which we operate, we create a more sustainable, reliable foundation for ourselves and our business.

### Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of holistic decision making?

When we make a decision about something, we base it not only on conscious considerations, but also on the subconscious level of importance that we ascribe to the area in which we are making a decision. For example, when deciding which type of milk to buy, we usually have a conscious preference and we also don't ascribe a high level of important to this decision, so we might make a decision quite quickly. Yet when it comes to buying a house, for example, we consider this decision to be of high importance – so we take the time to make sure we have made a good, sound, well informed decision.

One of the ways we can slip up, therefore, is in assuming that our immediate sense of the importance of a decision is in fact a correct assessment; it could actually be that there are new factors in play since we last made this decision, and by going with our habitual decision we are not

allowing for these new factors to be taken into consideration. To work with the simple milk example, it might be that we have some guests coming to stay and one of them is lactose intolerant. If we were to pause long enough to think about this decision we might well remember this fact and buy the type of milk they need – thus saving ourselves an extra trip to the supermarket.

Although the above example is simplistic, the process does indeed extrapolate to more important personal and business decisions. We need to remember to slow down enough to really take into account all the factors currently in play in the current situation in order to arrive at a truly holistic decision.

Also, some people are fearful of **decision making** for various reasons. One can be that they have made rash decisions in the past that have resulted in the unwanted outcomes and they have not realised that with an improved decision making process they could more reliably produce the desired results. Instead they remain in the dark about 'what went wrong' and simply shy away from making decisions. Thus it is very important to learn about the holistic decision making process.

Other people may be afraid of decision making because of how others may react; again this can be corrected by making it a practise to check in with other stakeholders to ask their needs and desired outcomes before making decision. In this way you can make a decision that includes consideration of the needs of other so that you avoid negative fall out.

### Characteristics and/or Behaviours of holistic decision making

- Clear consideration is given to both one's own desired outcome as well as that of other stakeholders. This way decisions are made that result in mutually beneficial outcomes. The benefit of this is sustainability and enhanced relationships (be they business or personal relationships).
- When there are potential impacts on indirectly involved parties, i.e. the wider community (including the environment), these are also taken into consideration, as there is an appreciation of the fact that a business' reputation can be made or broken by local community responses.
- The approach is to gather all the relevant information up front and then make the decision, rather than make a decision too early with the intention to fix things up in an ad hoc manner if necessary. There is an understanding that fixing up after the event is far more costly in terms of time, money, reputation and effort than making a well considered decision in the first place.
- Great care is taken to avoid making assumptions; where assumptions are spotted, the extra effort is made to gather some indicative data in these areas so that there is a firmer foundation upon which to make the decision.
- There is a practise in place to regularly review decisions that dictate on-going policy or strategy to ensure that any new factors are taken into consideration and the decision adjusted as necessary in order to maintain it's level of integrity and applicability.

- Various options are considered and more than one option may be trialed to test if the reality is as predicted. Adjustments are then made or other options trialed.

### Evaluate your own holistic approach to decision making

- When making a decision, how much time do you take to make a decision?
- What factors do you incorporate into making that decision?
- What influences your decision making process?
- On what level do you take into consideration the effects of your decisions?
  - On a scale of 1 (being lowest) to 10 (being highest) what score would you give yourself?
- On what level do you take the social effects into consideration?
  - On a scale of 1 (being lowest) to 10 (being highest) what score would you give yourself for social consideration in making decisions?
- On what level do you take the community effects into consideration?
  - On a scale of 1 (being lowest) to 10 (being highest) what score would you give yourself for consideration of the community in making decisions?
- On what level do you take the environmental effects into consideration?
  - On a scale of 1 (being lowest) to 10 (being highest) what would you give yourself for environmental consideration in making decisions?
- Think of the last fairly major decision you made, recap the process you went through and see how many of the characteristics listed in the last section of this document (Characteristics of holistic decision making) were involved in your process?

### Improve your holistic approach to decision making

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Notice how it makes you feel when you have made an excellent decision. Notice what specific behaviours and actions you took to reach this decision. Allow this insight to provide behavioural guidance, added motivation and inspiration for you to commit to becoming exceptional in your own holistic approach to decision making.
- Write your own holistic decision making protocol (PRP), and place it somewhere prominent to remind you of your personal commitment to increase the holistic nature of your decision making process. Make sure you set a range of considerations, such as:
  - Clearly working out your own needs and desired outcome

- Checking in with the other directly effected stakeholders to ascertain their needs and desired outcome
  - Taking into consideration knock on effects to the wider community and environment
  - Setting a review process if the decision is part of an on going strategy or process
  - Checking for assumptions and where you find them doing research to fill in the blanks more reliably
  - Allowing yourself to come up with a number of options then trial them to see which option is the most sustainable and workable
- Keep a log or notes in your diary that track your success in keeping to your PRP; where you do keep to how do your decisions turn out compared with when you follow it only loosely in your decision making process.
  - Seek out a person (or persons) who you believe consistently demonstrate “holistic decision making”. Interview them and ask them questions about their own development process to get to where they are now. Consider that this is a mentoring session where it may be expected that you will make a commitment to this person at the end of the interview and that it’ll be necessary for you to follow through.
  - Ask for feedback from your colleagues, staff, vendors, partners and customers about how they see your professional attitudes and behaviours regarding making holistic decisions. Give them permission to be honest, acknowledge and thank them for their feedback, and make commitments to them about what you will do with the feedback. You may need to prepare yourself for the possibility that you’ll be asked to make agreements with various stakeholders so that they can be more involved, be listened to and that their needs will be met more consistently in the future.

## Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of having an holistic approach to decision making, the following books, courses and consultants may be worth considering. Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources, the list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- <http://www.mindtools.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it is an incredible resource to assist people in developing their own professional skills regardless of whether they run their own business or work for someone else.
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it offers both personal and professional self-development information and resources. You can type in any search word you want, such as “sustainable decision making” and you’ll get a list of articles, blogs, resources and links to other sites which could assist you in your own development.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com/> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.

## Author and editor acknowledgement

**High Ideals** would like to acknowledge and thank Narelle Holland for her work on this document. Narelle is the Victorian State Membership Manager of High Ideals, a life coach, consultant and trainer and assessor. To find out more about Narelle, please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

This document is part of the **High Ideals** Criteria Information Series, edited by Claire Stretch. For more information on Claire please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

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